

Q.&A.: Allan A. Ryan Jr.

No Minor Cases for U.S. Nazi-Hunter

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WASHINGTON — One wall reverberates with a World War II poster of Allied guns blazing in unison against the Nazi enemy. Under it sits a vintage Zenith transoceanic radio that seems ready to crackle into life with a clandestine broadcast of the Resistance.

The setting is the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations for Nazi war crimes at 1375 K Street NW, and the adornments are the inspiration of the director, Allan A. Ryan Jr., a 38-year-old Boston-born lawyer who is sometimes called the nation's foremost Nazi-hunter.

Now, after three and a half years of prosecuting immigration fraud by suspected war criminals and Nazi collaborators charged with entering the United States under false pretenses, Mr. Ryan is preparing to leave the \$80,000-a-year job supervising the office's staff of 50 people.

Mr. Ryan, who came to the job from the Solicitor General's office, has told his superiors in the Justice Department that he plans to leave around August, shortly after submitting a report of his special investigation into American intelligence connections with Klaus Barbie, the former Gestapo leader now facing trial in France for war crimes.

Recently he agreed to an interview, saying he would not discuss the Barbie case, and spent several hours answering questions.

Q. Why are you leaving?

A. O.S.I. still has three or four more years left. I don't want to spend seven years in the office, so I feel I should leave now to give someone else a chance. I don't consider myself a Nazi-hunter. I consider myself a prosecutor. Like all prosecutors, I have to stay flexible.

Q. What next?

A. I'd like to write a book, maybe on the D.P. Act [Displaced Persons Act of 1948-54]. It's a neglected story. I've gotten a few nibbles.

Q. What is O.S.I.'s scorecard to date?

A. About 700 people have been investigated. We've prosecuted 32. Twenty-six of those cases are still in court. There are 12 denaturalization cases and 11 deportation cases pending. Five people died. One was deported.

Q. One?

A. The problem is these cases are tremendously complex and time-consuming. For revoking citizenship, there's a trial, appeal and certiorari. Then for deportation, there's a hear-



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Allan A. Ryan Jr., director of the Office of Special Investigations.

ing, appeal, U.S. Court of Appeals and Supreme Court. Potentially you have seven separate forums. You're talking about an awful lot of time.

Q. Why did it take so long to begin?

A. There was no conspiracy, if that's what you mean. Immigration was no den of Nazi sympathizers. After the war, evidence was hard to come by. It was one person's word against another. On a high level the decision was made not to pursue these cases. By '51 or '52 the impetus to investigate died out. Immigration employees saw there was no percentage in Nazi cases. It was also hard to come to grips with the Holocaust. Many people told me until very recently they could not even talk about it with their own families.

Q. What changed?

A. A national reawakening of conscience on the Holocaust.

Q. Any new strategies?

A. It seems to me judges should be more amenable. It would help if naturalization and deportation actions could be somehow combined. And extradition would be infinitely better than deportation, much quicker results. But other countries are reluctant. We've been told, "Why should we import America's war criminals?"

Q. But these people came from Europe. Can't we force them, the Rumanians, say? Tie it to trade relations?

A. Right. My philosophy is don't threaten, do it. The card is there. Let's leave it at that.

Q. How cooperative have the Russians been?

A. Very cooperative. We've spent hundreds of hours there getting witness depositions. Imagine! We were importing American legal procedure into Russia. I spent a day explaining the rules of criminal procedure back to Magna Carta to the Procurator General of the U.S.S.R.

Q. Have you found any cases at all in which people who committed atrocities were knowingly let into the country for intelligence purposes?

A. No. Maybe one, but it was unclear. He was later deported, back in the 50's. The others came in in perfectly ordinary ways.

Q. There's been no conspiracy?

A. No.

Q. Some critics say you should have concentrated more resources on the big cases.

A. Everyone agrees on the distinction but the survivors. The guard who guarded them was not a minor case.

Q. How does a Ryan get into this?

A. How can a Ryan not get into it? I've never seen this as a Jewish issue. It should concern everybody. It happened to all of us. But we're not here to avenge the Holocaust. We're here to apply the law.

Q. What have you learned?

A. I understand I understand so little. I do not understand how people could have done this. How could people have done this to each other? How could it have happened? I have to say, At last, I don't understand.

Ralph Blumenthal